

[On Tuesday night I spoke on the House Floor against the President's plan to escalate the war in Iraq](#) ([video](#)). For too long, the Republican-led Congress gave the President a blank check to pursue the war in Iraq, and I am glad that Speaker Pelosi scheduled time for a debate on Iraq and allowed every Member of Congress an opportunity to speak about the war.

Today, we will be voting on a [non-binding resolution](#) which states that moving more troops to Iraq is not the answer. Speaker Pelosi has promised that in the coming weeks, we will be voting on additional legislation to take the war in Iraq in a new direction. Taking a stand on the President's policy of escalation is just the first step -- soon Congress must take action to make significant changes in our role in Iraq.

The President should not have sent our troops into Iraq before exhausting all other possibilities. America's brave servicemen and women should only be put in harm's way as a last resort. American troops were sent to Iraq prematurely, and before the President had adequate reconstruction plans set in place.

Poor Planning Led to Today's Mess in Iraq

Today we are witnessing the results of the President's poor planning in Iraq. Over 3,000 of our brave men and women have given their lives, and 100,000 Iraqis have already been killed, the political situation there is in chaos, and if we continue with the President's current policies, there are no signs of progress on the horizon. The mission in Iraq is failing, and our troops are not receiving the armor and equipment they need. On Wednesday, the leaders of the Senate and House sent a letter to President Bush declaring that [our troops in Iraq deserve better armor and equipment](#).

"As Iraqi leaders bicker, the violence in Iraq continues to inflict casualties on our troops at unacceptably high rates. Equally disturbing is the fact that thousands of the new troops you are sending to Iraq as well as those already there will apparently not have the armor and equipment they need to perform the mission and reduce the likelihood of casualties."

In addition to poorly planning the reconstruction in Iraq, the President has also badly judged the needs of America's soldiers after they return home from the war. After our servicemen and women put their lives on the line for us, they have every right to come home expecting that we will help them recover from injuries sustained during the war. Lately, more and more veterans have been telling me about the massive bureaucratic obstacles they faced while trying to get treatment. Veterans often report that they have to wait on hold for over two hours before they can talk to a human at the VA about their medical status.

While President Bush wants to increase the number of troops performing dangerous duty in Iraq, he simultaneously denies the Veterans Administration the funding they need to help our men and women returning from the war. In fact, he proposed to give the VA only half of the increase it needs to help newly returning soldiers. Our veterans deserve better.

Strong Congressional Oversight is Needed

The time has come for greater Congressional oversight to ensure a new direction in Iraq and put in place policies to end the status quo. Since the beginning of this year, [Congress has held over 50 hearings](#) on various aspects of the Iraq war. What we are hearing is that we need to start moving our troops out of harm's way, and move the billions of dollars being spent on the war into health care for our veterans.

Civil war between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq now threatens to explode into a regional war, potentially bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia into open conflict. Israel could be drawn into the violence as well. Putting our servicemen and women in harms way was not the answer in 2003, and sending more of them to Iraq is not the answer today. We need a more diplomatic, political approach, bringing regional and international powers together to stop this conflict from getting farther out of control.

Instead of sending more troops to Iraq and further inflaming the situation there, it's time to bring our troops home. [How soon do you think our troops should start returning home?](#)